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THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 6 September 1960. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS¹

THE PROBLEM

To re-examine the likelihood of renewed Chinese Communist military activity in the Taiwan Strait area in the next year or so, and the consequences of the loss, evacuation, or successful defense of the offshore islands.²

CONCLUSIONS

1. Chinese Communist military capabilities in the Taiwan Strait area have improved since 1958. At the same time, Peiping's objectives in the Strait have not changed. We therefore believe that the Chinese Communists are likely within the next year or so to initiate a probing action to test again Nationalist strength and morale and US resolve. Although it is possible, we believe it unlikely that the Chinese Communists would launch surprise frontal attacks on one or more of the major offshore islands. (*Paras. 10-17, 19, 20*)

2. The Soviet attitude toward Chinese Communist initiatives in the Taiwan Strait area, and the degree of support they might accord the Chinese, would depend to a considerable extent on the

course of the current Sino-Soviet controversy. On balance, we believe that the USSR would agree to a Chinese Communist renewal of military pressure. However, we believe that Moscow would attempt to obtain assurances that Peiping would avoid actions likely to provoke a direct clash with US forces. (*Paras. 16-18*)

3. The loss of the major offshore islands either through assault or evacuation would be a severe blow to the Nationalist government and would impose a very heavy strain on US-Nationalist relations. (*Para. 25*)

4. If the islands were lost as the result of a Chinese Communist military attack, the Nationalist armed forces would be seriously weakened and the contribution the Nationalists could make to the defense of Taiwan would be seriously reduced. The Nationalist leaders would probably conclude initially that their government's rationale, national direction, and purpose had been all but swept away. These reactions might be somewhat miti-

¹ This estimate supplements NIE 43-59, "Prospects for the Government of the Republic of China," dated 17 November 1959 and SNIE 100-4-59, "Chinese Communist Intentions and Probable Courses of Action in the Taiwan Strait Area," dated 13 March 1959.

² This estimate is concerned primarily with the major offshore islands, Big and Little Chinmen and the Matsus.

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gated in time if with US assistance a large part of the island garrisons were saved. (*Paras. 26-27*)

5. Only the strongest US pressure could persuade the Nationalists to withdraw their troops from the offshore islands. Even if they could be persuaded, which is by no means certain, the pressures that would have to be exerted on them would leave a residue of great bitterness toward the US and would initially produce most of the political and psychological manifestations of Nationalist distress which would follow a military defeat. (*Para. 29*)

6. If the Nationalists were still convinced that the US would defend Taiwan and lend its full support to the political and economic development of the island, most of them would in time probably adjust to the situation and establish a new sense of individual and national purpose which would not necessarily exclude the hope of eventually regaining control of the mainland. Despite the demoralization and the political difficulties resulting from the loss of the major offshore islands, we believe that the government would continue to function and to maintain order on Taiwan, that it would still be possible to deny Taiwan to the Communists, and that the US could salvage some position of strength there. Taiwan would probably remain a link, although a much weaker and less militant one, in the anti-Communist defenses in the western Pacific. (*Paras. 31, 34*)

7. Loss of the offshore islands, whether or not the US had intervened, would

damage US prestige in the non-Communist world. A successful defense of the islands would give non-Communist nations greater confidence in US strength and determination. At the same time most of the non-Communist world would have been gravely alarmed by the outbreak of overt hostilities and in general would probably still believe that continued Nationalist control of the islands constituted a dangerous point of international tension. (*Paras. 28, 35*)

8. If the US had used nuclear weapons in the defense of the offshore islands strong disapproval and dismay would be aroused in most of the non-Communist world. Some Asian governments, such as South Korea and South Vietnam, probably would be encouraged, despite the weapons employed, by a US response which would defeat the Chinese Communist military thrust. In other non-Communist countries the adverse reaction to US use of nuclear weapons would probably be reduced to some extent if the US had used, against carefully selected military targets only, low yield weapons which did not result in large-scale civilian casualties, and if the hostilities had thereby been brought to an early end. Nevertheless, most non-Communist governments would regard the US actions as an exceedingly risky step which had exposed the world to the possibility of a widened nuclear conflict over an issue which they regarded as of relatively minor importance. Moreover, the US initiation of the use of nuclear weapons would provide the Com-

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munists with a potent issue for propaganda exploitation.³ (Para. 36)

9. Bloc reaction to US use of nuclear weapons would be determined by many factors, a number of which lie outside the scope of this paper. A key element in

³ The Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believe that the paragraph should read as follows:

"If the US were to use nuclear weapons in defense of the offshore islands the reaction of the non-Communist nations would vary. Some Asian countries would be encouraged by such a US response, while strong adverse reactions would be aroused in other countries by the US use of nuclear weapons. If the US were to make clear its intentions of limited employment and used low yield weapons against carefully selected military targets adverse reaction would be considerably modified. The degree of adverse reaction would also depend to a large extent upon whether the US nuclear response brought hostilities to an early and successful end. In any case the Communists could be expected to make maximum propaganda exploitation of US employment of nuclear weapons."

the USSR response would be its estimate of overall US intentions and probable counteractions. The Soviet Union might conclude that it must support Communist China in this situation and that the Bloc would have to respond to any US nuclear challenge. The likelihood of this would be increased if the US had used nuclear weapons against targets on mainland China outside the general area of hostilities.⁴ On the other hand, the USSR might conclude that nuclear retaliation would involve too high risks of spreading the conflict, and would seek to terminate the hostilities. (Para. 37)

⁴ The Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believe that this sentence should read as follows: "The likelihood of this would be increased if the US had used nuclear weapons against targets on mainland China which clearly were not in support of the Chinese Communist military effort."

DISCUSSION

I. THE SITUATION

10. In the Taiwan Strait area and on the offshore islands powerful forces continue to confront each other, as they did at the time of the 1958 crisis. In the Foochow area the Chinese Communists have an estimated 51,000 ground force troops facing the 21,000 Nationalist troops in the Matsu Island group. Around Amoy they have an estimated 98,000 troops facing about 70,000 Nationalist troops on the Chinmen Island group. The Nationalist garrisons on the Chinmens and the Matsus are at about maximum feasible strength; the Chinese Communists within 12 days could reinforce their troop strength in the Amoy-Foochow area by approximately 212,000 troops, including 3 airborne divisions totaling about 21,000. It is possible that this redeployment could be accomplished without detection by Nationalist or US forces, but any sizable concentration of amphibious craft could be detected.

11. Chinese Communist artillery strength in the Matsu-Chinmen areas totals about 850 pieces, as compared to 390 Nationalist pieces. The Chinese Communists have about 300-350 jet fighters based on the coastal airfields between Hai-men and Swatow, and 70 jet bomber aircraft based well within striking range of Taiwan. These forces could be supplemented rapidly by deploying aircraft forward from interior airfields. The Nationalist total jet aircraft inventory in operational units is 334 fighters and 24 reconnaissance.

12. Since their poor showing against the Nationalist air force during the 1958 crisis, the Chinese Communists have taken steps to improve pilot training. We believe it likely that they have received about 30 MIG-19's and they may have received some air-to-air missiles from the USSR. The effectiveness and strength of the Chinese Communist artillery

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facing the Chinmen group has increased. This was demonstrated during the barrages of 17 and 19 June 1960 when approximately 175,000 rounds were fired. The June shelling, unlike those during the 1958 crisis which were primarily interdiction and harassment fire, demonstrated that the Chinese Communists have planned and can execute effectively heavy neutralization fires of the type which would be used in preparation for an amphibious assault.

13. The Nationalists have received additional artillery, including 240-mm nuclear-capable howitzers, which have been emplaced on both Quemoy and Matsu. In addition, replacement of F-84 aircraft with century-series fighters has begun. Food, ammunition, and other supplies in abundance have continued to be stockpiled on the major offshore islands.

14. The Chinese Communists could seize any of the minor offshore islands⁵ with little difficulty. Against the Nationalists alone, they could make resupply and reinforcement of the major offshore island garrisons virtually impossible by a combination of artillery shelling and aircraft and motor torpedo boat attack. Against Nationalist defenders alone, they could also seize the Matsu and Chinmen Island groups; however, such a military operation would not only be very costly, but would require a buildup of men and equipment, preparatory shelling, and a preliminary battle for control of the air.

II. CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS

15. Communist China's basic objectives of destroying the prestige and position of the US in the Far East, gaining control over Taiwan, and eliminating the Nationalist government will almost certainly not change. The Chinese Communists probably recognize that if they acquired the offshore islands there would be a stronger international tendency toward a "two Chinas" solution. They have made it clear that they are not interested in the acquisition of the offshore islands *per se*, but regard

⁵ Such as Tatan and Erhtan of the Chinmens, and the Wu-ch'iu and Tung-yin islands.

Tung-yin

them as an integral part of the broader issue of Taiwan. The Chinese Communists do not want the status quo in the Taiwan Strait area to become stabilized and their belligerent pronouncements and militant posture vis-a-vis the Chinese Nationalists and the US indicate that Peiping will not allow the situation to remain quiescent indefinitely. Peiping probably believes that increased military activities in the Taiwan Strait area can create divisive problems in US relations with the Nationalist government and other allies. Thus, the Chinese Communists have both the capabilities and motivation to initiate again military pressures in the Taiwan Strait.

16. Communist China's courses of action will almost certainly be influenced strongly by developments in the current Sino-Soviet dispute, one aspect of which is Communist China's pressure for a more aggressive Bloc policy. If the two countries are unable to reach a workable accommodation, Moscow would probably refuse to back up Peiping in an offshore island venture. In any event, Moscow almost certainly does not attach as high importance or priority to eliminating the Nationalist government on Taiwan as do the Chinese Communists. The USSR may be concerned that once military activities in the Strait area were started they might get out of hand. The Soviets probably believe that the Chinese Communists underestimate the consequences of widespread hostilities with the US and of nuclear warfare. We believe Moscow is unwilling to run as high risks as Peiping in the Taiwan Strait, and would almost certainly attempt to exercise some degree of restraint on Peiping's military actions in the area.

17. On the other hand, Moscow probably views the Taiwan Strait situation, and the political potentialities it offers, as suitable for exploitation to its own advantage. It probably believes that the Bloc can stimulate divisions among the Western Powers and promote the political isolation of the US by raising the threat of general war arising out of a local conflict over the offshore islands. It may also view the situation as a possible useful supplement to any plan to heighten tensions or to further its own interests elsewhere, such as Berlin, the Middle

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East, or Africa. These considerations may cause the Soviets to lessen their restraints on Chinese Communist military activities in the Taiwan Strait area.

18. On balance, we believe that the USSR would agree to a Chinese Communist renewal of military and political pressures in the Taiwan Strait. However, we believe that Moscow would attempt to obtain assurances that Peiping would avoid actions likely to provoke a direct clash with US forces. The Soviet estimate of the US response would be the key factor in determining the nature of any prior Soviet commitments to the Chinese and of the restraints the Soviets would seek to impose upon them.

19. These considerations lead us to believe it likely that within the next year or so Peiping will again initiate a high level of military pressure in the Taiwan Strait area. The form and nature of this pressure cannot be predicted with assurance. We believe that it will be primarily a probing action designed to maintain a state of tension in the area and to test again Nationalist strength and morale and US resolve concerning the defense of the major offshore islands. It will probably be accompanied by intense propaganda and psychological pressures against the US and Nationalist governments and, perhaps, by a renewal of heavy artillery shelling of the offshore islands and naval harassment of their supply lines. It might include a sudden seizure of one or more of the minor offshore islands and/or increasingly aggressive air activity over the Taiwan Strait.

20. We believe it possible, but unlikely, that the Chinese Communists might, without preliminary probing, launch massive frontal attacks with the intention of seizing one or more of the major offshore islands.

III. CHINESE NATIONALIST INTENTIONS

21. The hope of eventual return to the mainland is a primary motive force within the Nationalist government. The Nationalist leaders regard the offshore islands as an integral part of Nationalist China. Moreover, they see continued control of these islands as

the symbol of return and as a first line of defense of Taiwan itself. They also believe that they must retain the offshore islands in order to sustain Nationalist morale, and to maintain the prestige and position of their government abroad. The Nationalist leaders recognize that their capability to attain their national objectives is critically dependent on the scale and timing of US assistance. Finally, they view the offshore islands as a possible means of involving the US in a war with Communist China, an eventuality which they almost certainly believe would provide them their best chance of returning to the mainland.

22. Although the US has never specifically stated that it would defend the major offshore islands, the Nationalists probably believe that the US in fact would help them to defend the islands. This belief is based upon their interpretation of the rationale of the entire US-Nationalist relationship, the stated position of the US with respect to Communist expansion in Asia generally, and the Nationalist conviction that the US could not afford to let a major Asian ally down in such a critical situation. If Chinese Communist military pressures increase, the Nationalists will seek more specific US commitments to the defense of the offshore islands. They would regard a failure of the US to help them defend the offshore islands as indicative of a weakening of US support for their claim as the legitimate government of China.

23. The Nationalists suffer a growing sense of frustration deriving from their belief that time is running against their return to the mainland. They are eager for an opportunity to strike out against the Chinese Communist regime and might be tempted to use their paratroop and special force groups for operations against mainland areas of reported unrest and dissidence.⁶ However, they probably

⁶ The nucleus of the Nationalist airborne-special force potential is one airborne infantry regiment totaling about 3,000 and 3 special-forces groups totaling about 4,500. The special forces operate in 200-300-man units and are trained not only for guerrilla combat but also to assume control of indigenous resistance elements and to take over political, economic, and civil affairs in their area of operations.

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would not engage in such operations against the strongly expressed wishes of the US.

24. The nature of Peiping's response to any Nationalist action against the mainland would depend on the scale and effectiveness of such action. If the operation were of appreciable size, we believe that Communist China would probably retaliate against the offshore islands and perhaps even Taiwan itself. Both Communist China and the USSR would seek to implicate the US in the eyes of world opinion as the fomenter of the Chinese Nationalist attack.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF THE LOSS OF THE MAJOR OFFSHORE ISLANDS

25. The loss of the major offshore islands either through assault or evacuation would be a severe blow to the Nationalist government and would impose a very heavy strain on US-Nationalist relations. The loss of one of the minor offshore islands would not have such serious consequences.

A. Loss Through Chinese Communist Military Action

26. If the islands were lost as the result of a successful Chinese Communist military attack, the Nationalist armed forces would be seriously weakened. Some of the best combat troops are stationed on the offshore islands and many would probably be killed or captured. Since a serious Communist effort to seize the islands would probably be preceded by a battle for control of the air, the Nationalist air force would probably be gravely weakened. The Nationalist navy also would probably suffer serious damages in the loss of many of its resupply vessels and personnel. These losses would seriously reduce the contribution the Nationalists could make to the defense of Taiwan.

27. The Nationalist leaders would almost certainly reassess, in an atmosphere of disillusionment and despair, their future prospects. They would probably conclude initially that the rationale and policies of the Nationalist government and its national direction and purpose had been all but swept away. Sus-

ceptibility on the part of some mainlanders to Communist subversion and propaganda would increase, anti-American feeling would be intense, and US-Nationalist relations would be characterized by cynicism and bitterness among the Nationalist officials. These reactions might be somewhat mitigated in time if with US assistance a large part of the island garrisons were saved.

28. US prestige in the non-Communist world would also suffer. If the US had not actively intervened in the conflict to aid the Nationalists, many countries which look to the US for assistance and protection would question the wisdom of such reliance. In addition, pro-US groups, particularly in the Asian countries, would be weakened. This would be so even if the US were to maintain that it had never been committed to the defense of the offshore islands. These effects would be accentuated if the US had taken an active, but limited, part in the hostilities.⁷ In any event, the Chinese Communists would exploit their capture of the offshore islands as a military defeat for the US and as evidence that US defense commitments are ineffective protection.

B. Loss Through Nationalist Withdrawal

29. Only the strongest US pressure could persuade the Nationalists to withdraw their troops from the major offshore islands. For the reasons set forth earlier, the Nationalists would look upon such a voluntary withdrawal as almost as disastrous as a loss of the islands to Communist military assault. The Nation-

⁷ The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that this sentence is too sweeping. If the US participated in an action which ended in Nationalist abandonment of the islands, the degree of loss of US prestige would depend to a considerable degree upon the nature and purpose of US participation. Asian allies of the US would be heartened to the extent that the US had demonstrated willingness to come to the aid of an ally but would be dismayed that successful defense could not be achieved. Damage to US prestige among European and neutralist countries would be tempered by relief that general war had been averted, and would be further reduced if the US had previously announced that it was taking part in the action for the purpose of evacuating Nationalist troops and civilians.

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alist leaders would consider the loss of their forward positions on the offshore islands as damaging to their defensive and offensive capabilities. Even if the Nationalists could be persuaded to withdraw, which is by no means certain, the pressures which would have to be exerted on them would leave a residue of great bitterness toward the US and would initially produce most of the political and psychological manifestations of Nationalist distress which would follow a military defeat.

30. However, if the Nationalists were to withdraw from the offshore islands before any Communist military attack were launched against them, the consequences in some respects would be considerably less serious than if the islands had been lost by military defeat. Most importantly, the Nationalist military forces would be intact and undamaged. Many non-Communist countries would herald Nationalist withdrawal from the offshore islands under circumstances which did not appear to be a direct result of Chinese Communist pressures as eliminating a dangerous and exposed position and as a constructive step toward a peaceful solution of the Taiwan Strait problem.

C. Outlook for the Nationalists

31. Thus, the loss of the offshore islands, either as the result of a military defeat or a withdrawal, would leave the Nationalist leaders with very difficult choices to make. They would tend to have doubts as to the nature and extent of future US support. However, they would also recognize their continued dependence on the US. Their estimate of subsequent US actions and attitudes would play a vital part in their choice. If they were still convinced that the US would defend Taiwan and lend its full support to the political and economic development of the island, most of them would in time probably adjust to the situation and establish a new sense of individual and national purpose which would not necessarily exclude the hope of eventually regaining control of the mainland. Some have already begun to accept the idea of a future on Taiwan, and many others would probably do

so if the political and psychological pressures generated by the theme of an early return to the mainland were lessened or removed.

32. There would be a few mainlanders who would seek to make a deal with Peiping, hoping to achieve a favored position on the mainland in exchange for delivering Taiwan to the Communists by means of subversion or a coup. However, most would probably conclude that continued existence under US protection offered more attractive prospects than placing themselves at the mercy of the Chinese Communists.

33. The Nationalist political problems with the Taiwanese would probably increase as the result of their demands for a greater voice in the government. These problems would be especially acute if the Taiwanese troops on the offshore islands had been lost. (Approximately 60 percent of the enlisted strength in the offshore islands garrisons is Taiwanese.) The Taiwanese would resist any attempt to turn Taiwan over to the Chinese Communists.

34. Despite the demoralization and the political difficulties resulting from the loss of the offshore islands, we believe that the government would continue to function and to maintain order on the island, that it would still be possible to deny Taiwan to the Communists, and that the US could salvage some position of strength there. Taiwan would probably remain a link, although a much weaker and less militant one, in the anti-Communist defenses in the western Pacific.

V. CONSEQUENCES OF A SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE OF THE OFFSHORE ISLANDS

35. A successful joint US-Nationalist defense of Chinmen or Matsu would give a great lift to Nationalist morale and to US-Nationalist relations. The Nationalist leaders would feel that their determination to hold the islands had been vindicated. Many non-Communist nations, especially those in the Far East, would be encouraged by this manifestation of US determination to block an aggressive thrust of the Chinese Communists. At the same time, most of the non-Communist world would have been gravely alarmed by the outbreak of

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overt hostilities; they would certainly be greatly relieved when the affair had been ended to the advantage of the West without spreading beyond the Strait area. Most of these countries would still believe, in spite of the outcome, that Nationalist control of the offshore islands constituted a point of tension which should be eliminated as a potential threat to world peace.

36. If the US had used nuclear weapons in the defense of the offshore islands, strong disapproval and dismay would be aroused in most of the non-Communist world. Some Asian governments, such as South Korea and South Vietnam, probably would be encouraged, despite the weapons employed, by a US response which would defeat the Chinese Communist military thrust. In other non-Communist countries the adverse reaction to US use of nuclear weapons would probably be reduced to some extent if the US had used, against carefully selected military targets only, low yield weapons which did not result in large-scale civilian casualties, and if the hostilities had thereby been brought to an early end. Nevertheless, most non-Communist governments would regard the US actions as an exceedingly risky step which had exposed the world to the possibility of a widened nuclear conflict over an issue which they regarded

as of relatively minor importance. Moreover, the US initiation of the use of nuclear weapons would provide the Communists with a potent issue for propaganda exploitation.⁸

37. Bloc reaction to US use of nuclear weapons would be determined by many factors, a number of which lie outside the scope of this paper. A key element in the USSR response would be its estimate of overall US intentions and probable counteractions. The Soviet Union might conclude that it must support Communist China in this situation and that the Bloc would have to respond to any US nuclear challenge. The likelihood of this would be increased if the US had used nuclear weapons against targets on mainland China outside the general area of hostilities.⁹ On the other hand, the USSR might conclude that nuclear retaliation would involve too high risks of spreading the conflict, and would seek to terminate the hostilities.

⁸ The Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believe that this paragraph should read as indicated in their footnote to paragraph 8.

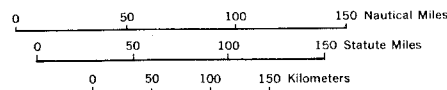
⁹ The Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, and the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believe that this sentence should read as indicated in their footnote to paragraph 9.

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EAST CHINA AREA AND TAIWAN ARMY STRENGTHS

15 July 1960

*Within 12 days



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EAST CHINA AREA AND TAIWAN
AIR AND NAVAL FACTORS
15 July 1960

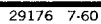
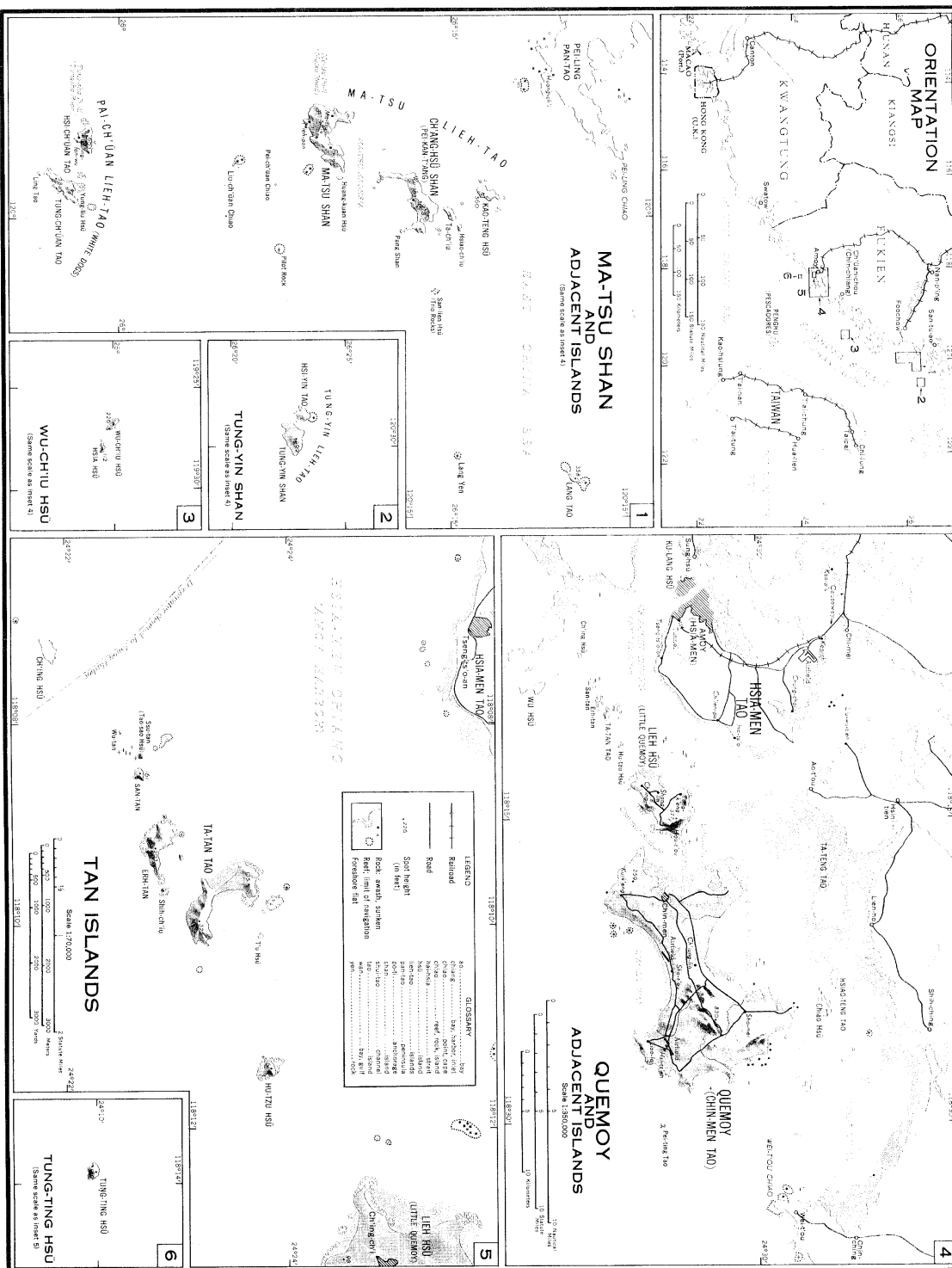




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